

WANDEHIGHFLYER



DAYS BEFORE TECH

We once lived in a world without screens

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Instagram : @wandehighflyer*
Tel/Whatsapp : +2347019806139
Email Address: wandehighflyer @gmail.com

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www.wandehighflyer.blogspot.com

DEDICATION

For every soul who still believes that presence is more powerful than Wi-Fi, and
that real Compassion outlasts Social media likes.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This book was born out of countless conversations, memories, and observations about a world that once was, and a world that is still unfolding.

I am grateful to my parents, who raised me in a time when letters, visits, and handwritten notes carried weight, and whose stories of life before the internet inspired much of my reflection.

To my siblings and extended family, who lived through both chalkboard classrooms and the rise of digital tools—you remind me that transition is never just about technology, but about people. To my colleagues and friends, especially those who shared nostalgic moments of childhood games, market days, and community gatherings before tech—your voices echo throughout these pages.

I also thank my mentors and teachers, who instilled in me the discipline of research, writing, and cultural reflection. You gave me the tools to connect memory with meaning.

Finally, to every reader searching for balance in this fast-moving digital world—this book is for you. May it help you carry forward the best of yesterday while embracing the opportunities of today.

Above all, I thank God for giving me the vision, strength, and clarity to complete this work.

INTRODUCTION

There was a time when life moved at a gentler pace. Days were measured not by screen time but by sunlight, by footsteps to a neighbor's house, or by the ringing of a landline that everyone in the household shared. News came through the radio, the evening paper, or the careful words of a town crier. Children played in open fields, friendships were built on long conversations, and communities were bound together by trust, storytelling, and presence.

Those were the days before tech.

This book is not a call to abandon technology, nor is it a nostalgic attempt to glorify the past. Instead, it is an invitation to reflect—to look back at how life was lived before smartphones, the internet, and social media redefined our routines, our relationships, and even our sense of identity.

As you read, you may find echoes of your own memories, or perhaps stories you've only heard from parents and grandparents. Either way, the purpose of this book is simple: to remind us that while technology has changed how we live, the essence of human connection—compassion, presence, and community—remains timeless.

CHAPTER ONE

The Rhythm of Life

Morning had its own orchestra long before screens did. Roosters offered the opening note, hawkers rolled their refrains down the lanes. Local Evangelist shouting – “GBA Jesu Saye E, ijoba Orun tide tan” (Accept Jesus in your life, the kingdom of God is here) Broom sweeps kept time on compound floors. Children answered the call with boots scuffed and uniforms hurried on, slinging satchels that thumped like small drums. School began with a bell or a shouted roll call; lessons were chalk on slate, questions asked into a teacher’s steady voice, answers earned by voice and effort, not by the glow of a search box.

Markets opened like living mosaics. Women arranged tomatoes and peppers into glossy pyramids, traders called prices the way drummers call dancers, and bargaining was a small theatre—loud, witty, immediate. In offices the typewriter’s clack stitched the day together; in villages, hoes and machetes marked the steps of farmers who read the weather in their bones. Work was visible, reputations obvious, promises kept face to face.

Back then, the compound tilted towards the shining full moon. Children spilled into the yard, their laughter rising above the hum of crickets. Ten-ten filled the night with claps and quick steps; ayo seeds clicked against wooden boards like miniature drums; suwe sent shadows darting between trees as bare feet slapped the earth. Football matches stretched across sandy grounds with stones for goalposts, while skipping ropes slapped rhythm into the air. The moon was lamp, referee, and companion, bathing the games in silver light until tired legs gave way to stories.

When the circle stilled, elders cleared their throats, and the night took on a new hush. Folktales began. The tortoise was a frequent visitor, cunning and greedy, always teaching by failure. Children leaned in as the tale of the sky feast was told—how Tortoise borrowed feathers from the birds, renamed himself “All-of-you,” and tricked his way to a banquet. But pride betrayed him. The birds reclaimed their feathers, and Tortoise fell to the earth, his shell forever cracked as a reminder of greed. The children gasped, laughed, and argued, their voices weaving into the night. Other nights brought Anansi the spider, the hare, or the wise old woman whose riddles outwitted kings. These stories were not just entertainment—they were instruction, moral law wrapped in laughter and suspense.

When the games tired and the children lay on their backs tracing constellations with their fingers, elders leaned forward and the air changed — the night sharpened into an appetite for tale. Folktales did something practical and sacred: they encoded cultural law into laughter and surprise. The trickster tortoise, the wise spider, the clever hare — these were not just characters; they were mnemonic anchors for ethics, wit, and caution.

Moonlight games and folktales performed civic work. They trained attention, memory, and moral sense in ways that modern feeds and notifications rarely do. The night that held both a skipping-rope rhyme and a story of cunning was also a night where community memory was rehearsed and handed down. You learned who had the loudest laugh, who could tell a story with proper shape, who kept a promise. Presence mattered; listening mattered.

This was life's cadence before tech: hands that played, mouths that told, and ears that learned. The moonlight was both stage and lamp; the folktale was script and law. As technology arrived and rearranged rhythm into pings and streams, many of these small civic rituals shifted, thinned, or migrated to new forms. But in memory they remain vivid — not as romanticized relics, but as practical models of how culture used to teach itself.

Life before technology was not fast, but it was full. A letter arriving after weeks carried the weight of ceremony; a visit from a relative was celebrated as an event. Waiting was part of life, and in that waiting, value was born. Presence mattered, and memory lived not in devices but in voices, minds, and hearts.

That was the rhythm of daily life before tech—slower, yes, but never empty.

CHAPTER TWO

The Art of Communication

In the days before technology, words traveled on legs, in ink, on wind, and in memory. There was no “delivered” check mark, no blue tick of confirmation. To send a message was to trust people, patience, and Providence.

Across continents and cultures, people found ingenious ways to share stories, pass on messages, and preserve knowledge—without a single byte of data. Whether under the stars in the savannas of Africa or in the icy plains of the Arctic, the need to connect was universal.

In ancient Mesopotamia, clay tablets bore the first known form of writing—cuneiform, a script etched with a reed stylus. It was used to record trade, taxes, and the stories of kings. The Egyptians developed hieroglyphics, intricate pictures that spoke of gods, battles, and dynasties. Their scribes were gatekeepers of power and memory, trusted with secrets of the pharaohs.

In China, oracle bones and bamboo slips recorded everything from royal decrees to astronomical observations. Paper, one of the world’s most transformative inventions, was born there long before the printing press in Europe.

But writing was only one form of communication. In North America, the Native American tribes used smoke signals, beadwork (like the wampum belts), and complex sign languages to convey messages across distances and between different linguistic groups.

In Australia, Aboriginal peoples communicated through songlines—oral maps passed down through generations in songs, each line charting physical and spiritual journeys across the land. Their messages lived not on paper but in melody, memory, and myth.

In the Arab world, long before radios or newspapers, poets were the voice of the people. A single poem could spread like wildfire across the desert, stirring rebellion or calling for peace. Even caravans carried more than goods—they carried news, gossip, and stories from distant lands.

Meanwhile, in Europe, heralds and messengers rode from kingdom to kingdom, their words bearing the weight of war or alliance. Church bells tolled not just for prayer but for danger, celebration, or the death of a king.

In every corner of the world, communication was deeply tied to culture, landscape, and spirituality.

And so it was in Nigeria, where the drumbeat replaced the printing press, and the town crier served as both journalist and broadcaster. While some wrote on parchment, others carved messages into memory. Where ink failed, rhythm spoke. Where letters were scarce, the spirit danced. The compound itself was often the first newsroom. A woman sweeping at dawn could call across the fence, “Mama Sola, have you heard?” and just like that, information leapt across families. What began as whispers became discussions, then debates, then news. Children were the most common messengers. They darted through alleys barefoot, carrying words like treasures tucked in their small mouths. “Your uncle is here!” or “Papa says you should come home quickly.” Some messages were grand—births, deaths, weddings—others were comically small: “Bring back the pot you borrowed.” But every errand mattered, because the child’s reliability carried the family’s honor.

There is something humbling in realizing that no matter how far apart the world’s people lived, they all sought to do the same thing: to connect. Whether by firelight or signal fire, gossip or through echoing chants or silent signs, humanity has always reached out to one another—not just to survive, but to be understood. Then there were letters. A letter arriving was not a routine matter; it was an event. The sight of an envelope bearing a faraway postmark stirred excitement. Families gathered around as the eldest broke the seal.

The words were not consumed in a glance but savored line by line, read aloud, then reread silently. Each curve of handwriting carried personality; each smudge of ink spoke of distance. Some letters bore perfume, others a pressed flower, still others a photograph with a carefully written note at the back. They were folded and refolded, kept in wooden chests, wrapped in cloth, or tucked inside family Bibles. To receive one was to hold proof that someone, somewhere, still remembered you. Replies were slow, but patience made affection grow deeper, not weaker. Love letters especially became heirlooms. Some lived longer than the lovers who wrote them.

For those without literacy, the town crier was the people's broadcast. His gong—kpàn! kpàn! kpàn!—cut through the dusk air, and people poured out of homes to listen. Standing beneath the big iroko tree or at a village square, he declared the chief's orders, market days, or warnings of danger. He carried no microphone, yet his voice reached the last hut at the edge of the settlement. The town crier was both journalist and herald, his words binding a community together. In his absence, silence meant mystery; in his presence, truth was expected.

But beyond letters and criers, communication had its deeper codes. Proverbs were the poetry of everyday speech. Direct words were often avoided; wisdom was hidden in imagery. An elder would never simply say, "Be patient." Instead, he might say: "Even the okra plant does not grow taller than the farmer who planted it." The hearer had to chew the words slowly, like kola nut, before meaning emerged. Riddles, too, tested wit, while praise poetry elevated names and lineages into living history. To master language was to master life.

Courtship was another theater of communication. A young man in love did not slide into a young woman's "DM"—he sent messages through elders, gifts, and symbols. Kola nuts presented at a family's doorstep spoke louder than words. Songs under the moon carried hints of desire. Even silence had meaning: averted eyes might mean "not yet," a lingering glance "perhaps." Love letters, when they came, were careful dances of metaphor. A girl could hide one under her pillow for months, rereading it until the ink blurred.

Quarrels, too, had their language. Two neighbors in conflict might shout insults so loudly the entire street became audience. But resolution was never faceless. Elders summoned both sides, sitting them in the open where reputation, shame, and reconciliation all had weight. Words mattered because they could not be deleted. They stayed in the minds of those who heard, carried into the marketplace, repeated at festivals, remembered for years. A reckless insult could destroy a name, just as a wise apology could restore it.

Drums also spoke. The talking drum was more than an instrument; it was a language in itself. Skilled drummers bent tones to mimic speech, sending coded messages across miles. A rhythm might warn of danger, announce a king's arrival, or praise a warrior's bravery. Entire villages could understand without a word spoken. To hear the drum was to hear a pulse of identity, a reminder that language was not only in mouths but in hands, sticks, and stretched hide.

Songs carried messages, too. Women sang at the grinding stone, embedding gossip into melody. Farmers sang on the field, sending words floating across furrows. Mothers sang riddles into lullabies, weaving history into dreams. Even play songs among children—"Suwe, suwe!" or "Ten-ten!"—carried small lessons about turn-taking, rhythm, and resilience. Every sound communicated.

The pace of communication was slow, but slowness gave weight. A letter could shape years. A proverb could settle quarrels. A drumbeat could summon courage. A folktale told under the moon could linger in memory until adulthood. Nothing was disposable. Nothing was forgotten as quickly as today's viral clip.

That was the art of communication before tech—layered, coded, deliberate. It was not just about sending information but about shaping identity. Every word spoken, every beat struck, every silence held was part of the great conversation that built community.

CHAPTER THREE

Learning without Screens

Before classrooms flickered with projectors or children carried tablets in their bags, learning was carved into memory, carried in voices, and written in chalk that dusted palms white. Education was not only about books—it was about people, about the patience of listening and the discipline of remembering.

Children's first classrooms were not schools at all, but laps. A grandmother's knees were a desk, her voice the blackboard, her proverbs the syllabus. "A child who will grow crooked," she would say, "is spotted while still young." Stories were lessons in disguise. The tortoise who lied and suffered taught the weight of deceit. The dog who lost his bone while looking at his reflection showed the danger of greed. These were not just amusements; they were blueprints for living.

When formal schooling came, the chalkboard became the king of the room. A single teacher, sometimes barefoot, stood before dozens of eager children. Chalk squeaked as letters were shaped, erased, and reshaped. Each word on the board felt like a miracle: a mark that could carry meaning, an idea frozen in dust. The children recited in unison, their voices rising and falling like waves: "A for Apple, B for Boy, C for Cat." The rhythm of repetition etched knowledge deep into memory.

The Story of Kunle and the Slate

In one rural school in south western part of Nigeria , a boy named Kunle owned nothing but a slate. Every morning, he polished it with water and rubbed it clean with sand. On it, he copied letters his teacher wrote. Sometimes, his chalk broke into tiny pieces, forcing him to hold it like a needle. Yet, to Kunle, that slate was a world. He practiced his sums under a mango tree until the slate shone with scratches. Years later, when he became a teacher himself, he kept the same slate on his desk—not to write on, but as a reminder that knowledge could sprout from even the smallest tools.

Apprenticeship was another form of schooling, especially for those who could not afford classrooms. A child destined to be a blacksmith, tailor, or trader was sent to "serve and learn." The master's workshop was the university, the tools the textbooks, the craft the thesis. It was learning by watching, then trying, then failing, then trying again. A boy who fetched water for a carpenter might one day learn to carve wood. A girl who ground pepper at a trader's stall might later learn the art of bargaining. There were no graduation gowns, only the day when the master declared, "You are ready."

Memory was the greatest library. Students memorized long passages of scripture, poems, and even entire histories. In Qur'anic schools, children sat cross-legged, rocking gently as they recited verses in Arabic, their voices weaving a chorus of devotion. In mission schools, hymns and catechisms filled the air. Forgetting was not an option; to forget was to lose the thread of identity. Oral tradition thrived here too—lineages, battles, migrations—all preserved in the mouths of griots and elders. They were living archives, human books whose pages could not be torn but only silenced by death.

Exams were rare but feared. A single test might decide whether a child advanced or stayed behind. Parents waited anxiously, not for online portals but for the teacher's word. A pass was celebrated with stew and laughter; failure brought shame that sometimes lingered for months. Yet even failure was part of the lesson—it taught resilience, responsibility, and humility.

The Teacher's Cane

In nearly every school, the cane was a silent authority. A child who failed to recite multiplication tables might feel its sting on the palm. The fear of the cane kept many awake at night, whispering “two times two is four, two times three is six” into the darkness. But behind the sternness was a strange kind of love: teachers believed discipline was fertilizer for success. And indeed, many who winced under the cane later thanked it, claiming the pain sharpened their focus.

Schooling was not equal. In villages, classrooms were mud huts, sometimes without roofs. Children wrote on the ground with sticks, erasing with their bare feet. In towns, desks and benches were luxuries; in cities, uniforms became symbols of pride. Some walked miles barefoot to reach their schools, carrying food in banana leaves. Rain or shine, they came, because education was hope, a ladder out of poverty, a chance to rewrite one's story.

Yet, the most powerful education still happened under the moon. After supper, children sat in circles while elders told stories, weaving history with entertainment. Folktales were not written in books but in memory. A single story could contain science, philosophy, morality, and humor. “Why the tortoise has a cracked shell,” “Why the sun and moon live in the sky,” “Why the dog barks at strangers”—every tale carried a lesson. These were lessons no textbook could capture, because they were alive, shared breath to breath, eye to eye.

That was learning before tech: human, oral, tactile, and slow. It demanded patience, rewarded memory, and stitched community together through knowledge. Every slate, every song, every folktale was a classroom. Education was not just what you knew, but who you became.

Hands That Learn Before Eyes Do

In Kyoto, a teenager is learning how to build a traditional shoji screen. His teacher doesn't show him a YouTube video. Instead, the master artisan demonstrates once, then silently watches.

The student's hands move slowly. The wood creaks. The blade slices. Every mistake becomes a lesson—not marked in red, but felt in the fingertips.

In Japan, this kind of apprenticeship is centuries old. It teaches patience, observation, humility—qualities rarely rewarded in an attention economy, but essential to mastery.

The Village Is the School

In rural Kenya, a girl walks with her grandmother through the fields. Along the way, she learns which plants are used for medicine, which animals leave which tracks, and which clouds signal rain.

The learning isn't structured by periods or bells. It's part of life itself.

In these communities, education is embedded in the act of living. It is personal, contextual, embodied. The elders are the search engines, and knowledge is passed on by walking beside it—not scrolling past it.

Beyond Necessity: A Choice

Not all screen-free education is born from limitation. In Germany, Waldorf schools intentionally keep technology out of early education. In Amish communities in Pennsylvania, children learn by doing—milking cows, repairing fences, running shops. In both cases, the goal is the same: to root learning in the real, to protect the developing mind from overload, and to build a sense of self that isn't mediated by algorithms.

The Quiet Revolution

Around the world, a quiet revolution is happening. Not against technology, but alongside it. It's a call back to balance. A reminder that while screens can deliver information, they can't replicate wisdom.

Learning without screens isn't nostalgia. It's not about rejecting progress. It's about remembering that humans learned long before pixels lit up our faces. And in many places, they still do—with great success.

CHAPTER FOUR

Market Without Machines

Before apps, before ads, before coupons, before Amazon—there was the market. The real one. Long before the clink of cash registers or the tap of mobile apps, trade lived in the flesh and breath of people. The market was not just a place to buy and sell—it was theater, court, festival, and school.

Early in the days,

In south western part of Nigeria, Market is not an everyday activity, Market usually open every five days and on market days, People travel across town and villages to buy their needs, most especially what they can not buy in their area. At dawn, the market stirred before the sun. Women balanced baskets of tomatoes, peppers, and vegetables on their heads, moving with the grace of queens across dusty paths. Men tugged along goats, chickens squawked in baskets, and traders arranged mats to display their wares. Smoke curled from roasted corn stalls, mixing with the smell of dried fish, palm oil, and freshly cut yam. The market was not quiet—it sang.

Voices rose like waves, bargaining back and forth:

“Three cowries for this bundle!”

“Three? You want to send me home hungry? Take it for five!”

“Four, and I will add a smile.”

Laughter followed haggling, but it was a serious dance. To bargain well was a mark of wisdom; to be cheated was a shame. The entire process was a test of wit, patience, and charm. Machines Can't Smell Mangoes

Here's something no AI can do: pick a ripe mango by smell.

In a floating market in Thailand, a woman named Mali doesn't weigh her fruit. She weighs your intentions. She sees if you're hungry, if you're distracted, if you're new. Her prices shift, not from a dashboard, but from intuition. She's been doing this since she was ten. Her mother did it. Her grandmother did it. The system is ancient—and flawless.

Mama Ife's Pepper Stall

In Ibadan's ancient market, Mama Ife was famous for her pepper stall. She didn't just sell; she performed. “Come and buy fire for your soup!” she shouted, tossing red peppers into the air like jewels. If a customer complained about the price, she burst into song: “If you don't want pepper, cook with water; but don't blame me when your husband runs to another pot!” The crowd roared with laughter, and by the end of the morning, Mama Ife always sold out. Her secret wasn't just her produce—it was her mouth, sharp as pepper itself.

Barter was the earliest currency. A farmer might arrive with yams strapped in a basket and leave with fish wrapped in banana leaves. A woman could trade a goat for a bag of millet. Sometimes it was direct, sometimes delayed. “Take my cassava today, and when your groundnuts are ready, I will come for them.” Trust was the ledger; memory was the record. Without honor, no one would trade with you again.

Apprenticeship thrived here, too. Boys and girls served traders for years, carrying loads, arranging stalls, learning the subtle arts of persuasion. They studied how masters charmed customers, remembered debts without notebooks, and balanced coins with the speed of fingers. When an apprentice finally sold on their own, it was a rite of passage, proof that they had graduated into the world of commerce.

The Iyalojas – Mothers of the Market

Markets were ruled not only by trade but by hierarchy. Women held the crown. The Iyalojas—market mothers—were enforcers, judges, and protectors. They decided who could trade where, settled quarrels, and punished cheating. If two sellers fought over a customer, the Iyalojas’ word ended it. They also acted as bankers, lending money to younger traders and expecting repayment in honesty. Their influence reached beyond the stalls; they could sway politics, raise levies, and mobilize entire markets in protest if wronged.

Currency, when it entered, came in waves. First cowries, clinking like tiny shells of the sea. Later iron rods, manillas shaped like bracelets, and then colonial coins and paper notes. Each form changed the rhythm of trade, but none erased the human pulse. Even cowries had to be counted by hand, sometimes in heaps that took hours. Children were often called to help: “Count this for me, ten cowries in a line!” Their tiny fingers learned arithmetic before classrooms taught it.

The Caravan of Salt and Gold

Far away in the Sahara, caravans of camels carried slabs of salt southward. Their hooves beat like drums on desert sand. Weeks later, they appeared in towns with glittering salt, ready to be traded for kola nuts, ivory, or even gold. Their arrival turned a market into a festival: drummers played, dust filled the air, children ran after the camels in wonder. Salt was not just seasoning—it was life, preserving food and healing wounds. The caravan traders brought with them not only goods but news, stories, and new songs, weaving distant places into the fabric of local life.

Trust bound everything together. Without receipts or contracts, your word was your wealth. A man who broke a promise could be ruined overnight. “He does not keep his word,” was enough to empty his stall of customers. Reputation could buy what money could not.

Markets were also theaters. Praise singers hailed wealthy buyers, dancers entertained crowds, drummers echoed important announcements. Even quarrels became spectacles, with two traders shouting insults while the crowd laughed. But after the storm, peace returned—because the market was bigger than any one fight. It was community itself, breathing.

That was trade before tech: hot, loud, alive. It was hand to hand, face to face, carried by trust and fueled by wit. Every yam, every pepper, every cowrie carried not only value but story. To walk into the market was to walk into the heartbeat of a people.

Why It Still Works

Because humans don't want everything optimized.
We want surprise. We want story. We want smell, touch, mood.
We want to feel who we're buying from.
And in these markets without machines, we get exactly that.
Not efficiency. Not speed.
But soul.

CHAPTER FIVE

where Market meets Merciments

The market was not just a place to buy and sell. It was the beating heart of the community, pulsing with life, sweat, laughter, quarrels, and song. If the farm was the backbone of survival, then the market was the face—the smile, the chatter, the noise that proved people were alive.

The Festival of First Steps

From the very entrance, the senses were attacked. The smell of roasted corn danced with the oily aroma of fried "*akara*" (Beans Cake). Goats wriggled against ropes tied to wooden posts, hens scattered feathers in protest, and hawkers sang their products into existence.

"Fresh palm oil o! Red like fire!"

"See your face inside my pepper—shine like mirror!"

Every shout was poetry; every product was a performance. Buyers didn't just hear prices—they were seduced, teased, and sometimes mocked into buying.

Children tagged along, balancing baskets on heads too small for the weight, eyes darting everywhere as they memorized the rhythm of adulthood. The market was the first classroom of life, and every step taught them negotiation, patience, and endurance. The Stage of Trade

To bargain was to act.

A woman buying fish might frown so hard you'd think she saw a ghost.

"This fish? *Abeg*, it has seen too much sun. One cowrie!"

The seller slapped her thighs. "One cowrie? May thunder strike laziness! Even a cat will reject one cowrie!"

The crowd roared. It was not just about yam, fish, or pepper. It was entertainment—a drama where buyer and seller knew their roles. Eventually, they shook hands, both pretending to have outsmarted the other, though the real winner was the market itself.

Even quarrels drew crowds. A customer accused of cheating could find herself encircled by curious onlookers. The more heated the words, the louder the cheers. By the end, someone would step in with a proverb: "When two elephants fight, it is the ground that suffers." The quarrel dissolved in laughter, and life continued.

Gossip, Politics, and Secrets

Markets carried the airwaves of society long before radios were born. As cowries clinked and tubers of yam were exchanged, tongues wagged.

“Have you heard? The chief’s son has taken a third wife.”

“Ehn! And yet his mother complains she has no grandchildren.”

News, scandals, politics—all flowed with the same ease as ground pepper. A person who skipped the market skipped the news. If the village square was the parliament, then the market was the newsroom.

Politicians and chiefs understood this power. Often, emissaries were sent to drop hints about new laws or to test the people’s mood. A single whispered rumor could spread faster in a market than any town crier’s gong.

Hidden Love and Market Sparks

But they were not just for cowries and gossip—they were also places of romance. Young men lingered too long at stalls, pretending to inspect tomatoes while their eyes feasted elsewhere. A girl carrying palm oil might bend low on purpose, her laughter carrying farther than her goods. Courtship began with casual greetings, hidden glances, and the exchange of kola nuts. A single calabash of palm wine offered could mean more than words.

Love letters sometimes passed secretly with change, folded tight inside wrappers of cloth. Sometimes, love was shouted across the noise—“Fine girl, your beauty is brighter than the afternoon sun!”—earning laughter, scolding, or if luck smiled, a shy smile in return. Entertainment in Full Color.

When trade slowed, merriment took the stage. Drummers struck rhythms that mimicked language. The talking drum sent coded praises, warnings, and satire. “Ògá seller with short temper!” the drum teased, and laughter erupted.

Storytellers painted the air with words. Their tales of trickster Tortoise, foolish kings, and cunning maidens drew crowds tighter. Each story carried a moral, but the flavor was in the laughter, the gasps, and the way listeners carried the tale home to retell.

Dancers added their own spice. Masked performers appeared during festivals, turning the market into a carnival. Children screamed half in fear, half in joy, as the masks swirled. Songs rose and fell, sometimes praising gods, sometimes mocking lazy neighbors. The market was a living theatre, and everyone—whether seller, buyer, or passerby—was an actor in its endless play.

Games That Crowned the Day.

Men huddled over ayo olopon boards, fingers moving like drummers' sticks. Bets were serious: kola nuts, meat, gourds of palm wine. Every seed dropped was a statement, every victory a bragging right that lived for weeks.

"Did you hear how Baba Kola defeated Alhaji Musa with one move?" The story spread like wildfire.

Children claimed their corner with tire-rolling contests, ten-ten, wrestling matches, and rope skipping. Dust rose as boys grappled, each one determined to prove strength before the watching crowd. The victor raised his arms like a king, basking in glory greater than the prize.

Girls clapped and sang folk songs, their voices weaving harmonies that softened even the toughest faces. Their songs teased, mocked, and praised. They were memory keepers, turning gossip into melody, turning work into joy.

The Spirit of the Market

Markets were not merely economic—they were spiritual. Some people never began trading without first sprinkling gin on the ground for ancestors. Others tied charms to their stalls for protection. A good day's sales was never just skill—it was favor. Songs of praise rose to gods and spirits, thanking them for prosperity and protection.

When Trade Slowed, Merriment Took Over

Somewhere in the center, griots and drummers always found a crowd. A man with a cracked talking drum tucked under his arm could summon attention with a single beat. He shifted his pitch, mimicking human tones, delivering praise-songs to chiefs or warnings about greedy husbands. Women covered their mouths in laughter; men tried to pretend the satire wasn't about them.

Storytellers stood on stools, commanding circles of listeners. They spun tales of the sly Tortoise, the brave hunter, or the foolish man who tried to outwit the spirits. Children leaned forward, eyes wide, mouths open. Adults nodded, catching the wisdom wrapped in humor. Folklore was not just play—it was memory passed forward, stitched into laughter and gasps.

Where Business Met Joy.

Trade gave food and money; merriment gave identity and soul. Together, they built a rhythm that technology has never replaced. In those days, every coin mattered, every laugh lingered, and every drumbeat traveled farther than memory itself. The market was not just economy. It was spectacle, community, and joy—the place where sweat met song, where quarrels turned to comedy, and where a single day could echo in the heart for a lifetime.

In truth, the market was life condensed. It was business, politics, romance, religion, gossip, theatre, and playground all in one. It was noisy, chaotic, and saucy, yet it was the glue that held communities together. A person might forget what they bought, but they never forgot the laughter, the quarrels, the songs, and the echoes of drums that followed them home.

CHAPTER SIX

Messages, Bants, Gossips without DM or FaceTime

The Messenger's Path

When a message had to be delivered across compounds or villages, it often began with children. Barefoot and eager, they darted along dusty paths, bowls balanced on their heads, voices carrying urgency:

“Mama says come quickly!”

“Papa says don’t forget the palm wine!”

Sometimes, in the rush, they forgot half the details, but tone did the work. Everyone knew when “come quickly” meant joy—a birth, a feast—or sorrow—a death, a sudden sickness.

Trusted adults were also messengers. Couriers walked long distances with staff in hand, carrying greetings, warnings, or requests. Their arrival was ceremony; the bearer of news was honored with water or palm wine before the message itself was heard. Words were not light—they carried weight, and weight deserved respect.

Letters as Treasures

The day a letter arrived was like a festival. An envelope meant more than paper—it meant memory traveling across rivers and forests. Families gathered around the reader—usually the eldest or the most educated—listening with rapt attention.

Some letters smelled faintly of perfume; others had pressed flowers inside. Photographs slipped from the folds, showing distant faces frozen in time. Each line was savored, read and reread, stored in wooden boxes or tucked in Bible pages. Replies took weeks or months, but patience only sharpened the sweetness.

A single letter could mend a broken friendship, spark a romance, or declare a decision for the whole family. Unlike text messages that vanish, letters lingered—folded, kissed, stained with tears, sometimes lasting longer than the sender themselves.

The Town Crier's Gong

Then came the living radio—the town crier. His gong struck at dusk—kpàn! kpàn! kpàn!—summoning villagers to hear news. Barefoot but proud, he stood at crossroads or beneath the tall iroko tree and shouted proclamations:

“There will be a festival on the third market day!”

“The chief forbids farming tomorrow!”

“A thief has been caught—justice awaits!”

The town crier's lungs replaced speakers, his authority replaced headlines. People trusted him, feared him, laughed with him. His words were law wrapped in performance, sometimes exaggerated, always remembered.

Proverb and Indirect Speech

But not every message was shouted. Much of pre-tech communication was coated in poetry. Direct speech was rare; subtlety was the art. Elders spoke in proverbs:

“The child who says his mother will not sleep, he too will not sleep.” (Patience is wiser than defiance.)

“When the drum beats too loud, it is ready to burst.” (Pride leads to downfall.)

A stubborn son might hear ten proverbs before realizing he was being corrected. Lovers spoke in riddles, hiding affection in metaphors. Even quarrels were cooled with wise sayings, giving hot tempers a softer landing. Words were not just tools; they were art, music shaped into meaning.

Àmì: Speaking Without Words

Among the Yoruba, silence itself could be language. This was àmì—the art of signs, symbols, and unspoken cues. A folded palm frond left at someone's door might mean “danger lurks.” A broken pot at a compound entrance could announce a quarrel or even divorce. A kola nut sent through a messenger could signal friendship, while palm wine could open doors for courtship.

But perhaps the most powerful silent signals came from mothers. A single look across the courtyard could speak volumes. Children knew the meaning of their mother's eyes:

👁️ A sharp, wide-eyed glare: “Stop that nonsense immediately before I reach you.”

- 👁️ A quick dart toward the kitchen: “Go and bring what I asked for.”

- 🧑 A slow, steady gaze: “You’re misbehaving in public; wait till we get home.”

- ✨ A soft, lingering look: “I see you, I’m proud of you.”

No words were needed. The language of the eyes was a code written over years of love and discipline. In crowded gatherings, at market stalls, or during ceremonies, mothers guided their children without breaking conversation, just by using their eyes.

It was communication as sharp as a whip and as tender as a lullaby. Children understood it instantly—no translation, no argument. In truth, a mother’s glance was the first school of discipline before any classroom.

Gossip in Twisted Tongues

Communication was not always solemn. Sometimes, it was playful—especially when gossip was in the air. Among the Yoruba, people had a clever way of twisting language so only insiders caught the gist.

A phrase could be shortened, stretched, or rearranged, hiding the true meaning in rhythm and melody. Outsiders might hear it as nonsense, but those in the circle knew exactly who or what was being discussed.

Market women were masters of this. While selling tomatoes, they could exchange entire stories about someone’s secret romance or misfortune, and outsiders would think it was just banter. In this way, gossip itself became poetry—coded in wit and laughter.

Àlámì: The Mole in the Midst

But not all communication was innocent. In every group, there was the danger of the àlámì—the mole.

An àlámì was the one who smiled with the group but whispered their secrets to enemies. In village politics, he sat among friends during meetings but later carried their plans to rival camps. Among women in the marketplace, she laughed and bargained, but later exposed private quarrels to stir more trouble. Even among children, the àlámì was known—the one who ran to parents to report every playful mischief.

The danger of an àlámì was not just betrayal but distortion. Rarely did they carry news exactly as heard; they spiced it with exaggeration, twisted tone into scandal, and added pepper to plain truth. In this way, one careless tongue could set a whole community ablaze.

The Yoruba had a proverb:

“Àlámì kì í tan lóríṣííríṣíí òrò.”

A mole never carries a matter without adding their own flavor.

Thus, while letters and drums were trusted, the words of an àlámì were feared. Communities thrived on communication, but they also survived by knowing whom not to trust.

Courting in Code

Love before technology had its own language, written in gestures. A girl’s laughter at a certain pitch, the way she adjusted her wrapper, the deliberate slowness in serving food—these were paragraphs of meaning. A boy’s gift of kola nuts, or the way he greeted a family elder, could speak louder than ten love letters.

Romance was slow, layered, and thrilling. Every glance was a sentence, every silence a paragraph, every action a book.

The Talking Drums

In many villages, drums were not for dance alone—they spoke. Skilled drummers mimicked tones of language, relaying news, praises, or warnings. A single beat could summon a chief, call warriors, or announce danger.

Across valleys, people heard the drum’s coded messages and understood. It was the wireless telegraph of its time—fast, far-reaching, and respected. Even festivals were impossible without the talking drum, for it carried not only rhythm but also story.

Quarrels and Consequences

Disagreements in those days were not fired off in capital letters on a screen. They were staged in compounds, under the gaze of neighbors. To speak recklessly was dangerous—words carried reputations that stuck like palm oil stains. Elders mediated disputes with patience, wisdom, and, sometimes, satire. The wrong insult could follow you for years, repeated in songs or market gossip.

Every word was a stone. To throw one carelessly was to risk shame, not just for yourself but for your entire family.

This art of human communication was not unique to Africa—it was global.

- In Asia, messengers carried scrolls sealed with wax, their loyalty tested by distance and time.

- In medieval Europe, kings relied on heralds—men in bright cloaks shouting decrees in town squares, much like town criers.

- In the Americas, before telegraphs, Native tribes used smoke signals rising into the sky—brief puffs that meant danger, long streams that meant peace.

- In the Pacific Islands, conch shells were blown across waters to summon people, their echo carrying like a natural loudspeaker.

Every culture had its own àmi—symbols and gestures that spoke louder than words. A fan flicked in a Spanish ballroom could declare love or rejection. A folded flower in an Indian wedding could mean agreement or refusal. A silence held too long in a Japanese household could say more than a thousand spoken words.

The world was connected, not by wires, but by creativity, memory, and trust.

Slowness as Value

What technology calls delay, the old world called depth. A letter that took months to arrive was read a hundred times. A proverb dropped in a conversation might be chewed for weeks. A drumbeat echoed across distances, reminding people of community.

Back then, communication was not disposable—it was memorable, soulful, and binding.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Travels and Exploration without Travel Agents

Before airplanes, trains, and smartphones shrank the world into a digital village, human beings were already travelers and explorers. The instinct to move — whether for food, trade, survival, worship, or knowledge — is as old as humanity itself. Movement was not a luxury; it was a necessity that shaped cultures, built empires, and connected distant peoples long before modern technology.

Travel before technology carried unique challenges. Journeys meant exposure to hunger, unpredictable weather, wild animals, betrayal, and disease. Yet despite these risks, people pressed forward. Why? Because travel opened doors to wealth, diplomacy, spiritual fulfillment, and discovery. Caravans crossing deserts, pilgrims walking hundreds of miles, and emissaries carrying gifts to foreign rulers all reveal one truth: mobility has always been central to human history.

The Sahara Desert as a Highway

Though feared as a “sea of death,” the Sahara was never an empty wasteland. For centuries, it was a vast trade route connecting North and West Africa. Long caravans of camels — nicknamed “ships of the desert” — carried salt, gold, ivory, slaves, and textiles across thousands of kilometers. The journey was harsh: heat during the day, freezing cold at night, and sandstorms that could bury travelers alive. Yet the promise of wealth made the risks worthwhile.

The salt mines of Taghaza and Taoudenni supplied salt blocks that were exchanged for gold dust from West African rivers. Without modern navigation tools, travelers relied on stars, oral instructions, and the wisdom of seasoned guides. Oases like Timbuktu, Gao, and Agadez served as resting points where not only goods but also cultures, languages, and religions were exchanged.

Timbuktu and the Intellectual Travelers

Timbuktu was not merely a market city; it was an intellectual hub where books were as valuable as gold. Scholars traveled with manuscripts wrapped in leather, spreading knowledge of law, medicine, astronomy, and theology. Students journeyed from far regions to study in madrasas (Islamic schools). In a sense, Timbuktu became a “university town” centuries before Oxford or Harvard gained fame.

Mansa Musa's Legendary Pilgrimage

Perhaps the most famous African journey before technology was the pilgrimage of Mansa Musa, emperor of Mali, in 1324. His caravan reportedly included 60,000 people, 12,000 slaves, and hundreds of camels carrying gold. Along the way, he distributed so much gold in Cairo that the local economy was destabilized for over a decade. His pilgrimage was both a religious duty and a diplomatic statement: Mali was powerful, wealthy, and connected to the wider Islamic world. This journey positioned West Africa as a key player in global trade and politics.

The Swahili Coast and Indian Ocean Routes

On the eastern coast of Africa, the Swahili city-states — Kilwa, Mombasa, Malindi, and Zanzibar — thrived as maritime hubs. Using monsoon winds, sailors navigated to Arabia, India, and even China. They exported ivory, gold, and slaves, and imported spices, cloth, and porcelain. These journeys did not only shape commerce; they also shaped culture. The Kiswahili language itself emerged as a blend of Bantu, Arabic, Persian, and later Portuguese influences — evidence of centuries of human movement.

Ethiopian and Nubian Diplomacy

Travel in Africa was not only about commerce; it was also about politics and diplomacy. Ethiopian kings exchanged emissaries with European monarchs and the Middle Eastern world. Nubian kingdoms along the Nile negotiated treaties with Egypt and later resisted Arab invasions. Travel for diplomacy often involved gifts: exotic animals, gold, crafted artifacts, and religious symbols.

African travelers often relied on more than physical preparation. Spiritual rituals preceded long journeys. Hunters invoked Ògún, god of iron, before venturing into forests. Market women sang chants and tied protective amulets on their waists before crossing dangerous rivers. Messages traveled through drumming systems — the “talking drums” of West Africa could send complex signals across villages faster than runners. Among enslaved Africans, hairstyles such as cornrows were used as escape maps, with braids indicating paths, safe houses, or rivers.

As a Yoruba proverb reminds us: Ìrìn àjò ní ñ kòní ní oḡbón — Travel teaches wisdom. Each journey carried lessons in patience, courage, and human connection.

Asia's web Journey

Asia was known for humming with footsteps of traders, monks, explorers, and dreamers. The Silk Road wasn't just a dusty highway of camels and horses; it was the internet of the ancient world. Merchants carried silk, jade, porcelain, and spices, but they also carried gossip, songs, recipes, and sometimes heartbreaks. A trader could set out from Xi'an in China, sipping green tea, and by the time he reached Persia, he'd be chewing on pistachios and learning to say "salaam."

Marco Polo made his name walking that path, but he wasn't alone. Long before his boots kissed those roads, there were Chinese monks crossing deserts to bring back Buddhist scriptures, Indian merchants exchanging pepper for gold, and Arab travelers bartering perfumes for silk. Ibn Battuta, the Moroccan wanderer, traveled so far that if he had a loyalty card, he'd have earned free trips around the globe twice over. His diary reads like someone's exaggerated travel blog, yet it was real — India, China, Southeast Asia, the Maldives, even deep into Africa.

And then came the oceans. Before tech, the sea was a mystery and a monster, but Asian sailors turned it into a highway. The Indian Ocean was like a bustling Lagos market — everybody came with something: the Arabs brought frankincense, the Indians brought spices, the Chinese came with porcelain, and the Swahili traders joined with ivory and gold. If you could stand at an Indian Ocean port in the 14th century, you'd hear so many languages flying around that you'd think Google Translate was in the air.

And what about Zheng He? Now that man was a vibe. A Chinese admiral in the 15th century, he commanded fleets so massive they made European ships look like toy boats. His treasure ships sailed to India, Arabia, and East Africa, carrying silk, porcelain, and prestige. Wherever Zheng He dropped anchor, diplomacy followed. He gave gifts, collected tributes, and built relationships — imagine WhatsApp diplomacy, but in the form of giraffes, spices, and gold. One story says when his fleet reached East Africa, they returned to China with a giraffe. The emperor saw it and thought it was a mythical qilin — talk about cultural misunderstanding with a sprinkle of awe!

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Middle Eastern Pathways

If Asia was the beating heart of long-distance trade, the Middle East was its lungs — breathing in stories, goods, and ideas, and exhaling them into the world. Caravans moved like slow-moving cities across deserts, camels swaying side to side with the arrogance of knowing they were the only Uber that mattered. Without those humped creatures, half the world's economy would have suffocated. They carried gold, incense, manuscripts, and, let's be real, some serious gossip from Baghdad to Damascus to Cairo.

The pilgrimage to Mecca — the Hajj — was not just about faith, it was also a travel network. Pilgrims came from Africa, Asia, and Europe, converging on Arabia with their dialects, clothes, songs, and stories. Imagine being in Makkah centuries ago, hearing Hausa chants mixing with Turkish prayers, Persian merchants bargaining in one corner, while an Indonesian pilgrim marveled at the desert sun. That was globalization before the word was even born.

And in between those sacred stops were the caravanserais — the ancient equivalent of motels, but with a sprinkle of diplomacy and street drama. Traders, monks, poets, spies — everyone gathered around the fire, eating flatbread, sipping tea, and swapping secrets. If walls could talk, those caravan inns would have spilled more tea than Twitter. A Persian envoy might whisper about Mongol movements, while an Indian trader warned about pirates on the Arabian Sea. You see, not all diplomacy happened in palaces; some of it was sealed over lamb stew under the desert stars. The Ottoman Empire later turned travel into a fine art. Roads stretched like veins across their vast territories, connecting Istanbul to Cairo, Baghdad, and beyond. And let's not forget their diplomacy — sometimes sealed with gifts like silk, other times with marriages. A princess sent across the desert wasn't just a bride, she was a treaty with legs. And those gifts? Oh, they knew how to flex. Jewel-studded daggers, gold-threaded carpets, Arabian horses — forget email attachments, these were attachments with weight.

Of course, the Middle East also had its own code languages. Poets spoke in verses that sounded like love songs but were actually political jabs. Merchants developed sign languages with their hands, because in a noisy bazaar, shouting “discount!” wasn't always elegant. And then, of course, there were the alami — the moles. Every caravan had one: that quiet traveler who pretended to be part of the group but was really reporting to some emir or sultan. You couldn't just gossip freely — one wrong word, and your words would travel faster than your camel. But beyond the politics, there was a spirit of curiosity. Arab geographers drew some of the most accurate world maps long before Europe “discovered” anything. Al-Idrisi's map in the 12th century practically made Google Earth look like a latecomer.

They knew the earth was round, they charted coastlines, they connected knowledge from Africa, Asia, and Europe — and they did it with ink, parchment, and patience.

Travel here wasn't only about trade and power; it was about knowledge. Scholars journeyed from city to city chasing teachers like fans chasing celebrities. A student might walk weeks just to hear one lecture in Damascus, then trek another month to read a manuscript in Baghdad. These were intellectual pilgrimages — slow, sweaty, but world-changing.

And let's not pretend the Middle East wasn't a place of flavor. Spice routes ran through it like arteries — cinnamon from India, nutmeg from Indonesia, saffron from Persia. Imagine the bargaining scenes in a medieval bazaar: "Brother, taste this saffron, it will make your rice sing." The air must have smelled like a five-star kitchen, and yes, someone was definitely overcharging.

African Voyages and Pathways

Picture the Sahara Desert: endless sand, sun that could roast yam, and silence so deep you could hear your own fear. Yet, for centuries, caravans crossed it like it was Third Mainland Bridge. Camels moved in single file, carrying salt slabs, gold dust, kola nuts, manuscripts, and fabrics. These weren't just trade trips — they were moving banks, moving libraries, moving WhatsApp groups of their time. The merchants were walking news channels; by the time they reached Timbuktu, they knew who married who in Cairo, who died in Marrakesh, and which king in Ghana was flexing with a new palace.

And then there was Mansa Musa, the Malian king whose pilgrimage to Mecca in 1324 shook the world. This man didn't just travel; he redefined what travel meant. He set out with thousands of attendants, soldiers, and servants, carrying so much gold that when he passed through Cairo, he literally crashed their economy. Imagine dashing people gold like gala on the highway! Centuries later, economists were still talking about that flex. But beyond the wealth, Musa's journey built bridges — he sponsored mosques, funded scholars, and connected Mali to the wider Islamic world. His trip was half pilgrimage, half diplomatic summit, half PR campaign. If LinkedIn existed then, his profile would've broken the app.

Down at the Swahili Coast, travel had a different flavor. The ports of Kilwa, Mombasa, and Zanzibar buzzed with ships from Arabia, India, and even China. African ivory, tortoise shells, and gold met Indian spices and Chinese porcelain. The Swahili people didn't just trade goods — they traded culture. Their very language, Kiswahili, was born from the marriage of Bantu roots and Arabic influences. It was like watching cultures dance in rhythm: African drums beating with Arab ouds, Indian spices mingling with coastal fish stews.

In Ethiopia, travel often carried a diplomatic weight. Emperors sent emissaries to Europe to negotiate alliances, while monks trekked to Jerusalem as part of spiritual pilgrimages. Even before the colonial era, Africans were sitting at tables of diplomacy, cutting deals, and, yes, facing betrayal from *alami* — those sneaky insiders who sold secrets to outsiders for a few shiny coins.

But African travel wasn't always golden and glorious. Sometimes, it was survival. Nomadic groups moved with the rains, following pastures for their herds. Families migrated across rivers and forests, guided by stars and oral maps. And when colonial powers arrived, travel turned into exile, forced marches, and even coded resistance. Enslaved Africans carried secrets in their hair — literally. Mothers braided escape routes into their daughters' cornrows. Hairstyles became Google Maps. One braid meant "turn left by the river," another meant "follow the mountain ridge." If you saw a line of women, heads bent under the sun, you'd never guess their hair was broadcasting directions of freedom. Communication itself was part of travel. Talking drums sent messages faster than any runner. In Yoruba land, a drummer could announce a death, call a meeting, or even shade someone — all in beats. If you misbehaved, your gist could spread from one village to another in the time it takes to fry puff-puff. Across Central Africa, drums carried warnings of raids, or love messages disguised as rhythms. Over in Southern Africa, signals of smoke curled from hilltops, saying: "Strangers are coming" or "Gather now." It was travel without moving.

And oh, the gossip. Africans perfected the art of code-switching long before Instagram captions. Yoruba women, for example, could twist a sentence mid-air and turn harmless talk into gossip only insiders understood. Two women at a market could be buying tomatoes and at the same time roasting a neighbor with subtle jabs. Outsiders thought it was ordinary banter, but insiders heard the sting. In Hausa markets, traders used proverbs as camouflage: a simple saying could expose a cheat without ever calling his name. These were verbal passports — if you didn't understand, you were simply not part of the journey.

Africa before tech was a land in motion. Kings traveled to prove their might, traders traveled to feed nations, families traveled to survive, and sometimes, entire communities traveled to escape. And with each journey came a story, a proverb, a warning, a betrayal, or a blessing.

Europe's travel was also steeped in coded communication. Nobles wrote letters that disguised political critiques as poetry. Monks annotated manuscripts with hidden messages. Townsfolk used humor, riddles, and proverbs to pass information while keeping outsiders clueless. Even gossip carried power: a joke in the wrong ear could alter alliances or expose secrets. The ability to move, observe, and interpret signals was just as important as the physical journey.

Ultimately, Europe before tech was a mix of survival, performance, diplomacy, and commerce. From Viking explorers navigating icy waters, to pilgrims enduring grueling treks, to courtiers whispering secrets in royal halls, travel shaped societies, economies, and alliances. Movement was never simple — it was a multi-layered dance of wit, courage, and human connection.

Europe pathways and shenanigans

Europe was a restless tapestry of kingdoms, forests, rivers, and mountains, long before trains, planes, or even decent maps. Travel wasn't just a way to move from point A to point B — it was an art, a gamble, and sometimes a spectacle. In the north, the Vikings ruled the waves. Their longships carved paths across icy fjords, the North Sea, and even down to North Africa. They weren't merely raiders; they were merchants, diplomats, and accidental cartographers. Imagine showing up in a foreign village with fur, silver, and a sword — half of diplomacy, half of intimidation. And yes, they left runes that were basically “Viking tweets” for anyone clever enough to read.

Pilgrimages were another major driver of movement. Devout Christians trudged hundreds of miles to Santiago de Compostela, Canterbury, or Rome. These journeys were exhausting, often dangerous, but social hotbeds in their own right. Inns along the route became buzzing marketplaces of news, gossip, and deals. A pilgrim could hear whispers of a noble plotting a coup, merchants scheming to cheat rivals, or rumors of distant famine. Pilgrimage was both piety and an accidental intelligence network.

Royal diplomacy added drama and tension. Marriages weren't matters of the heart; they were walking treaties. A princess sent from France to Spain wasn't just a bride — she was a political lever, a mobile alliance. Gifts accompanied these journeys: jeweled crowns, tapestries, exotic animals, and rare spices. These were Europe's flexes — the “look at my power” moves of the era. And spies lurked everywhere: a courtier pretending to admire a painting could secretly be passing state secrets under the table. Gossip was currency; words were weapons. Markets pulsed with life and intrigue. Venice, Bruges, and Florence were hubs where merchants shouted over one another, selling silk, wine, and spices while exchanging rumors about distant wars or royal scandals. Humor was part of the game. A trader exaggerating his goods might also drop sly hints about a rival's debt — subtle, witty, and dangerous. Travel through these markets demanded more than stamina; it demanded wit, attention, and sometimes, a sense of humor sharp enough to survive a verbal ambush.

Even mundane travel was an exercise in observation and ingenuity. Bridges were scarce, roads muddy, maps often unreliable. Travelers had to read signs in the environment: a twisted tree marking a hidden path, a particular rock formation indicating a fordable river. Miss a sign, and you could stumble into a bandit's trap or a hostile lord's territory. And of course, travelers needed to read social cues just as carefully: a merchant's bow, a noble's curt nod, or the laughter of townsfolk could signal danger, opportunity, or a market ripe for negotiation.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Hearts Before Technology

Long before screens lit up faces and apps dictated romance, human hearts were clever, daring, and endlessly inventive. Love existed in glances, songs, gestures, riddles, and secret codes. Across continents, courtship, relationships, and marriage required creativity, wit, and courage — a delicate dance of desire, negotiation, and social cunning.

Africa: Love, Life, and Divine Drama

In Africa, love was both a mortal and divine affair. Among the Yoruba, young men and women communicated through glances, gestures, playful teasing, and songs. Mothers taught daughters to read the eyes of suitors, to detect honesty, cunning, or mischief. A lingering smile across the compound, a subtle bow at the well, or a teasing nudge could speak volumes. Markets, festivals, and communal spaces became stages for flirtation: a wink here, a whispered joke there, a song shared at dusk. Every gesture carried meaning, and gossip spread like wildfire, only understood by those clever enough to decode it.

Even the gods had their love stories. Sango, the fiery god of thunder and lightning, was as passionate in romance as he was in battle. His love life was legendary, full of drama, rivalry, and devotion. Among his many wives, Oya was the most renowned, matching Sango's fiery temperament. Their love was tumultuous and electric, yet it carried lessons: love demanded courage, negotiation, and respect. Sango's wives were not passive; they asserted influence, playfully competed, and navigated their complex relationships with strategy and wit.

These divine tales became human templates. Mortals learned from Sango and Oya that love could be powerful, volatile, and transformative. Young lovers developed clever methods of secret communication: songs at evening gatherings, drum beats carrying hidden messages, carved symbols left in unseen corners, or playful riddles exchanged during chores. Markets and public spaces pulsed with this secretive energy. A merchant might nod to a secret beloved across a bustling stall, a neighbor might pass along a whispered note, a song hummed just for one ear — love was everywhere, yet hidden in plain sight.

Europe: Courtship, Gossip, and Strategy

In Europe, romance was as much strategy as passion. Nobles learned the art of courtship alongside swordsmanship, etiquette, and poetry. A bow, curtsy, or elegantly written poem could launch alliances or ignite scandal. Letters were treasures, carefully scented, sealed in wax, and sometimes hidden in sleeves to reach secret lovers. Gossip traveled faster than messengers. A whispered “he fancies her” could circle the castle walls before dinner, shifting reputations, loyalties, or alliances.

Legends of love were grand and daring. Tristan and Isolde, for example, navigated forbidden passion with secret messages, clandestine meetings, and clever disguises. Humor and playful teasing were vital tools; a witty remark could bind hearts as firmly as gold or silk. Public dances, fairs, and marketplaces doubled as arenas for subtle flirtation, clever communication, and observation of social cues. Lovers tested each other’s wit before committing hearts. To love in Europe was to master observation, subtlety, and performance.

Marriage was a mixture of ritual, diplomacy, and public spectacle. Many unions were arranged to solidify political or economic alliances, while others were bold, clandestine, and secretive. Courtship required patience, creativity, and courage, because one misstep could spark scandal or jeopardize one’s position. Humor, gossip, and clever communication remained essential: a joke at the right moment, a subtle gesture, or a shared secret could determine the fate of romance.

Asia: Poetry, Song, and Subtlety

In Asia, love flourished in elaborate codes and expressive art forms. Japanese lovers used *kōshikake*, leaving secret notes under benches or temple doors. Chinese scholars composed poetry that doubled as romantic correspondence, weaving messages of affection into literature. In India, songs, dances, and performances served as veiled conversations: gestures signaled consent, longing, or caution, often interpreted only by the intended partner.

Love required ingenuity. Public appearances were stages, and private messages required cleverness. Lovers relied on observation, memory, and social awareness to navigate families, societal expectations, and community norms. Humor, riddles, and playful banter were essential — a subtle tease or clever jest could express desire while maintaining discretion. Marriages combined ritual, strategy, and artistry, celebrating unions while reinforcing social structures, alliances, and family expectations.

The Americas: Courtship Across Continents

Long before text messages or social media, the peoples of the Americas had their own clever ways of expressing love and commitment. Among the Incas, runners carried messages between villages, not just about trade or politics, but also to coordinate courtships and secret meetings. Young lovers exchanged tokens, songs, and symbolic gifts, often under the watchful eyes of family and elders. Communication relied on observation, memory, and ingenuity — a missed beat or overlooked gesture could mean misunderstanding or missed opportunity.

In Aztec city-states, bustling marketplaces became arenas for flirtation. Young men and women subtly signaled interest through song, dance, and clever riddles, all while maintaining social decorum. Marriage proposals were sometimes accompanied by public performances or symbolic offerings — cacao beans, jewelry, or intricately crafted goods — demonstrating both affection and resourcefulness. Gossip spread swiftly: a whisper about a secret admirer or a clandestine meeting could ripple through a community, influencing alliances, reputations, and family negotiations.

Native American tribes across North America wove romance into daily life. Storytelling preserved lessons of love and marriage. Tales about clever tricksters taught loyalty and patience; stories of star-crossed lovers warned about social boundaries. Love required attention, cunning, and courage, whether navigating familial approval or traveling long distances to meet a beloved.

Britain: Drama, Decorum, and Coded Affection

In Britain, love before technology balanced etiquette, cunning, and social observation. Nobles and commoners alike expressed affection through gestures, letters, poetry, and clandestine signals. Secret love letters, sometimes written in code or disguised as mundane correspondence, allowed lovers to communicate across distance or disapproving families. Winks, bows, or subtle touches in public could express desire while maintaining propriety.

Courtship was a form of performance. Public dances, festivals, and social gatherings were stages where young men and women displayed wit, intelligence, and charm. Gossip spread quickly, and cleverness in conveying or concealing affection often determined success. Romantic strategy was as much about reading people as expressing feelings: knowing when to act, when to wait, and how to interpret subtle cues was essential.

Marriage often balanced love with duty. While some unions were arranged for wealth or alliances, many couples found ways to express genuine affection within societal limits. Families monitored relationships closely, making discretion, wit, and careful negotiation essential. Lovers relied on intermediaries — trusted friends or servants — to convey secret messages or coordinate meetings, turning romance into a game of strategy and subtlety.

Universal Threads: Secrets, Strategy, and Survival

Across Africa, Europe, Asia, the Americas, and Britain, a few truths persisted: love thrived on observation, creativity, and secret communication. Humor and playful teasing were essential; gossip could advance or destroy relationships. Courtship required strategy, diplomacy, and subtlety. Marriage combined ritual with negotiation, alliance-building with emotion. Stories — of gods, mortals, or legendary lovers — guided young hearts on how to navigate desire, loyalty, and social expectations.

From the divine passions of Sango in Africa, to the coded letters of Tristan and Isolde in Europe, to the poetic gestures of lovers in Asia, to the symbolic tokens of the Americas, and the strategic etiquette of Britain, pre-technology romance demanded ingenuity, courage, and heart. Love thrived in glances, songs, gestures, and riddles — proving that even without smartphones, DMs, or social media, humans found ways to connect, communicate, and celebrate the most universal of human experiences.

CHAPTER NINE

Sweet Reflections from the Days Before Tech

Ah, the days before tech — a world where the most dramatic notifications came from a neighbor's gossip or a mother's raised eyebrow. Imagine the thrill of waiting for a message carried by a friend, a drumbeat, a song, or even a cleverly hidden note. There were no emojis, no instant read receipts, and certainly no accidental double-taps. Yet, somehow, humans thrived, and romance, friendships, and social cleverness reached heights of artistry that modern tech could never replicate.

In Africa, the theater of love was everywhere. Young people became masters of observation, humor, and subtlety. Picture a village at sunset: children playing under the last golden rays, elders chatting in the shade, and teenagers sneaking glances, trying not to be noticed. Sometimes it was a wink that meant "I like you," other times a song hummed in the courtyard held an entire conversation. Mothers would shake their heads knowingly, whispering to neighbors, "Ah, see the young ones. The heart is awake tonight!" And gossip was a sport — a whispered comment about who had been sneaking to see whom could travel faster than the fastest runner in the village.

Even gods played in this human drama. Sango, the god of thunder, never missed an opportunity to demonstrate that love was fiery, unpredictable, and, occasionally, hilarious. There are tales of him challenging his wives to playful competitions, throwing minor lightning sparks to punctuate arguments, and causing dramatic swoons and laughter among humans who witnessed or recounted these stories. His passion was not just drama; it was education. Sango's escapades taught lessons: love is intense, relationships require negotiation, and laughter and play are part of keeping bonds alive. Move across the Mediterranean to Europe, where courtship was both an art and a sport. A young nobleman might hide a love letter inside a loaf of bread, a vase, or even a hollowed-out book. The thrill of discovery — "Did she see the rose I slipped into her hair? Or the poem folded in her sleeve?" — was unmatched. Public dances were arenas of subtle flirtation. A wink at the right moment, a cleverly timed bow, or a teasing smile could mean victory or heartbreak. And the gossip! Oh, the gossip. Lords and ladies whispered about clandestine meetings, secret alliances, and who was secretly meeting whom in the moonlit gardens. The castle halls echoed with curiosity, laughter, and occasional scandal.

In Asia, love became a beautiful game of poetry, gestures, and ingenuity. Japanese lovers left messages tucked under benches or in temples, often so cleverly hidden that only the intended recipient would find them. Chinese scholars wove secret affection into poems, using metaphors that could make the heart race without revealing a thing to the uninitiated. In India, dancers communicated through subtle motions in performances, their gestures layered with meaning and intention. Humor, clever riddles, and playful teasing were essential. A perfectly timed joke could spark laughter, while a shy glance could ignite desire. The interplay of art, intellect, and emotion made love both a challenge and a joy.

Across the Americas, creativity in love and communication flourished as well. Among the Incas, messages ran across villages via skilled runners, often carrying love notes or poetic challenges along with news. Young people exchanged symbolic gifts — cacao beans, handcrafted ornaments, or woven tokens — with layers of meaning. In Aztec markets, playful flirting was part of daily life. A song, a dance, or even a shared joke could carry volumes of unspoken affection. Gossip spread, yes, but it also became part of the fun — everyone in the community knew that secret messages could bring laughter, teasing, and maybe even a little embarrassment. Native American tribes integrated humor, storytelling, and playful competition into courtship. Trickster tales weren't just for entertainment; they were lessons in patience, wit, and understanding human behavior — crucial skills for anyone navigating love before text messages.

Britain's version of pre-technology love carried its own drama and delight. Secret letters, hidden in books, on benches, or in carved wooden boxes, allowed young lovers to communicate safely under watchful eyes. Public gatherings, dances, and fairs were stages where wit, charm, and clever observation decided the fate of romance. Imagine a playful nudge, a whispered jest, or a teasing challenge during a dance — the stakes were high, but so were the smiles, laughter, and shared secret victories. Even in the strictest social circles, humor and subtle playfulness made love an adventure.

Across all these continents, one truth stands out: love before tech was rich, complex, and undeniably human. There were no shortcuts, no instant gratification, no emojis to convey nuance. Instead, humans relied on creativity, courage, humor, and empathy. Every interaction — a glance, a song, a joke — was a puzzle, an invitation, and a thrill. Communities played an active role, ensuring that the dance of love was both guided and celebrated, with gossip, humor, and shared stories forming a living curriculum of human connection.

And let's not forget the lighter moments — the outright hilarity of human invention in romance. Picture a young man so smitten that he writes a secret message on a leaf and ties it to a bird, only for it to fly the wrong direction. Or a young woman leaving a note in a hollowed-out fruit, only to have it eaten by a goat before her beloved could find it. Such incidents caused bursts of laughter, communal teasing, and sometimes, creative improvisation. The stakes were high, but joy and fun were never in short supply.

What about the everyday humor? Young lovers often tested each other with small pranks: swapping laundry baskets to see if the other noticed, hiding the other's shoes for a playful chase, or sending coded jokes via neighbors. Elders often joined in the fun, offering sly guidance while secretly enjoying the chaos. Festivals and public gatherings were prime opportunities for laughter, playful banter, and clever demonstrations of affection. No modern app could replicate the combination of suspense, humor, and heart that these real-life interactions offered. Even marriage — often seen as formal or dutiful — carried opportunities for playful joy. Negotiations could involve clever gifts, humorous performances, or mock competitions that tested compatibility while providing communal amusement. Weddings, while ceremonial, were also lively celebrations, full of jest, music, storytelling, and shared laughter. The human heart, even under obligation or duty, found ways to play, joke, and revel in the absurdity and beauty of love.

Ultimately, the days before tech were not just a prelude to modern convenience. They were a testament to human creativity, humor, resilience, and joy. People didn't just survive without technology; they thrived. They flirted, joked, loved, and laughed in ways that required imagination, patience, and heart. The lessons remain: attention to subtlety, patience in communication, courage in love, and the joy of shared humor are timeless.

As we reflect, one truth becomes clear: life before technology was a grand, ongoing performance of the human spirit. It was messy, funny, passionate, dramatic, and deeply heartfelt. And even in our hyper-connected, screen-driven world, the same principles apply. Observe, laugh, tease, and connect — with courage, creativity, and heart. Because whether through drumbeats, handwritten letters, whispered jokes, or subtle glances, the human desire to connect, love, and share joy is eternal.

So next time your phone freezes, your message gets lost, or your Wi-Fi disappears, remember the leaf, the goat, the secret note, and the mischievous wink. Remember that in a world without screens, humans laughed, loved, and thrived in ways that were messy, brilliant, and unforgettable. Life before tech was not just a memory — it was a celebration of ingenuity, humor, and heart. And isn't that something worth smiling about, chuckling over, and carrying into today?

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